January 2013

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REPORTING IN THE SPHERE OF LEGITIMATE CONTROVERSY: The Irish Press and the 2003 Iraq Crisis

Janne Halttu

Introduction

Soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks the invasion of Iraq became a viable policy option within US President George W. Bush's administration. By early 2002, the planning of military and communications strategies for the invasion was in full progress (Woodward, 2004: 1–4, 110–111; Doig et al., 2007: 28). The US and the UK built the case for war on dubious intelligence on Iraqi WMD capability and links to terrorism, which allegedly constituted a threat to international peace and security. The UN weapons inspectors led by Hans Blix returned to Iraq in late 2002 but failed to produce conclusive evidence of an Iraqi WMD programme.

While the US/UK public relations campaign posed a challenge to media organisations worldwide, European media in countries such as Germany (Lehmann, 2005; Ates et al, 2005), France (Palmer, 2004), Sweden (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005), and Turkey (Ates et al, 2005) were rather critical of the invasion. In many countries, different outlets expressed varying degrees of support and opposition to the Anglo-American policy. This seems to have been the case in Norway (Ottosen, 2005b), Slovenia (Erjavec, 2005), Spain (Gunnarson, 2005), Ireland (Phelan, 2005) and Austria (Carfora et al., 2005). In Denmark, which was part of the coalition of countries which offered concrete support for the war, the media were rather supportive even though there were also some critical tones (Kristensen and Ørsten, 2007).

Many studies on Iraq War coverage have remained mainly descriptive, with no explicit aim to find inferences in the media coverage of international conflicts. Among the few exceptions are Stolle and Hooghe's (2005) cross-national research on television news coverage; Dimitrova and Strömbäck's (2008) comparison of Swedish and US press coverage; and Lehmann's (2005) analysis of German and US media coverage of the UN weapons inspections in the lead-up to the war. All three studies support the notion that national foreign policy lines and political elite opinion explained the differences between countries. These findings are congruent with theories of media–state relations originating from American political communication literature. However, some studies have put more emphasis on the efficiency of US strategic communications abroad (Mucunguzi, 2005; Comrie and Fountaine, 2005; Nohrstedt, 2005; Kupe and Hyde-Clarke, 2005; Rafeeq, 2007).

Manufacturing Consent Literature

Over the years, political communication literature has addressed the relationship between media and foreign policy (e.g., Cohen, 1963; Entman, 2004; Nacos et al., 2000) especially during international crises (e.g., Hallin, 1986; Bennett and Paletz,

1994; Mermin, 1999). No conclusive evidence has emerged to support the radical 'CNN effect' thesis, which claims that real-time news media have started to drive foreign policy (Gowing, 1994; Jakobsen, 1996; Strobel, 1997; Mermin, 1997; cf. Robinson, 2002). While Somalia is often used as an example of the CNN effect (Cohen, 1994: 9–10), Mermin's (1999: 137) study concluded that it was rather a demonstration of 'the power of governments to move television.' Similarly, the claim that the media 'lost' the Vietnam War has been rather painstakingly rejected: the media merely reflected the breakdown of consensus on Vietnam policy in Washington (Hallin, 1986; cf. Culbert, 1998). In fact, the findings suggest that the media tends to serve the interests of the government by 'manufacturing consent' for the official policy. Accordingly, Zaller and Chiu (1999) have called the media 'government's little helper'.

While only a few well-tested theories on the nature of this relationship between media and foreign policy have emerged, there is evidence to suggest that the range of debate is set by the executive branch of the government (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, 1993; Entman, 1991) or wider elite (Hallin, 1986; Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999) in the US. These notions are known as *executive* and *elite* versions of the manufacturing consent paradigm (Robinson, 2001: 525–236).

Herman (1993: 45), drawing on the executive version, argues that '[b]oth structural analysis and empirical evidence of media performance support the view that the mainstream media tend to follow a state agenda in reporting on foreign policy.' This is not surprising if one considers how heavily news production relies on government sources (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979) that provide 'easy access to information' (Luostarinen, 2002: 274). Consequently, government institutions can have disproportionate access to the media (Hall et al., 1978: 57).

However, several studies maintain that the government has such dominance only in certain conditions, for example, when the government has a clear policy line (Robinson, 2002), elites agree on the policy (Hallin, 1986) or when the policy is successfully implemented (Mermin, 1996). In accordance with Hallin's (1986) findings on Vietnam War coverage, W. Lance Bennett's (1990: 108) influential 'indexing hypothesis' suggests that 'mass media news is indexed implicitly to the dynamics of governmental debate'. In effect, this rule implies that views that are not expressed in elite debate would not be found in the news coverage while conflict among the officials 'serves as a signal for journalists to expand a story to encompass the views of experts, social groups, opinion polls, and other sources that reflect the observed differences among powerful politicians' (Bennett, 1996: 376). A number of case studies support the theory while adding further nuances to it (Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986; Livingston and Eachus, 1996; Mermin, 1996, 1999; Zaller and Chiu, 1999; Bennett et al., 2006). Robinson (2002: 31) summarises the lessons from this literature by arguing that when there is no disagreement on an issue within the elite, the media operate within the 'sphere of consensus'. Media coverage remains uncritical and helps to build support for official policy. When there is elite dissensus, the media operate in a 'sphere of legitimate controversy': the coverage reflects the divisions and may become critical of government policy.

Althaus (2003: 387) points out that some previous studies in the US, including Bennett's (1990) and Mermin's (1999) studies, have omitted international actors from the analysis. Meanwhile, Althaus et al (1996: 418) argue that when elite consensus

prevails, journalists turn to foreign news sources to provide the 'other opinion' 'to satisfy the norms of conflict and balance' which implies that coverage is indexed to international elite opinion. Yet, Zaller and Chiu (1999: 24) suggest that journalists evaluate the newsworthiness of a source by their 'capacity to foretell or affect future events.' This 'mechanism', which may give foreign sources greater access, is sometimes referred to as 'power indexing' (Zaller and Chiu, 1999; Billeaudeaux et al., 2003). O'Regan (2010: 457) uses 'the political calibration effect' to refer to the media's tendency to index their sourcing strategies to wherever 'the trail of political power may lead' (Alexseev and Bennett, 1995: 397).

Exporting Theories of Media-State Relations

There are two main concerns when exporting American theories of media-state relations to Europe or other regions. First, American media theories may not work outside its borders because 'other democracies organise press coverage on the basis of different normative understandings about power, citizen information, and the role of the press in political communication' (Bennett, 1996: 376). For example, among the most noticeable differences between the US and European media systems is the weight put on public service broadcasting and the higher level of competition between newspapers in the latter (Sparks, 2007: 77). Despite these differences, some studies suggest that the executive version (Lehmann, 2005; Glasgow University Media Group, 1985) and elite version (Tumber and Palmer, 2004; Eilders and Lüter, 2000) might have wider relevance across countries. Stolle and Hooghe (2005) analysed television news coverage in nine countries and the pan-Arab Al-Jazeera, and suggest that government policy lines were a crucial factor in determining coverage of the Iraq War. Tumber and Palmer (2004: 164–5) concluded that their findings on British media-state relations during the Iraq Crisis are consistent with Hallin's (1986) findings. Eilders and Lüter (2000) analysed editorials in the German press during the Kosovo War and conclude that the editorials failed to provide perspectives that were not already present in parliamentary debate – which indicates that the indexing hypothesis might explain media-state relations also in a multiparty system (cf. Otopalik and Schaefer, 2006).

Second, states and news organisations are part of hierarchical international systems. Hence, some studies emphasise American influence on national media during international crises through the dominant position of both the US government and news organisations as sources of information (Soderlund et al, 1994; Mucunguzi, 2005; Nohrstedt, 2005; Nord and Strömbäck, 2006; Ottosen, 2005b; Thussu, 2000a, 2000b). Ali Rafeeq's (2007) study on the press coverage of the Iraq War in New Zealand emphasises the ability of the US government and military sources to dominate the news agenda due to newspapers' dependence on a few Anglo-American news agencies and media outlets. Similarly, Kupe and Hyde-Clarke's (2005) study on South African media during the Iraq War points out that national media may have insufficient resources to cover international conflicts independently. Instead, they rely on Western news agencies, which, according to some scholars, conform to the interests of Western governments (Thussu, 2002: 205). This implies that the media, rather than 'manufacturing consent' for the views of national foreign policy elites, reflect the viewpoints of major powers in the international system – as suggested by power indexing.

The most recent and serious challenge for the generality of theories of media–state relations is Archetti's (2007) 'Global News Model'. She conducted cross-national research to test the validity of theories from the field of political communication, international communication and news sociology, and concluded that:

> [t]he news framing of 9/11, as the study of its coverage in eight newspapers across four different countries [US, France, Italy, Pakistan] suggests, can effectively be explained by the selection of newsworthy sources within the news. It is the range of sources, their variety of origin (foreign rather than national) and identity (politicians/intellectuals/social actors/religious leaders etc.) that determines the scope and variety of the news discourse. The choice by journalists and editors of which sources are newsworthy is guided by national interest, journalistic culture, and editorial policy. These variables act as multiple and progressive filters on the media professionals' judgements of newsworthiness: they shape their *news values*.

In sum, it is still unclear to what degree country characteristics, such as differences in national media systems, political systems and positions in the international system, affect the generality of the theories of media–state relations but, eventually, '[r]eal advances in theoretical development with respect to the media and foreign policy will ultimately depend on our looking at more countries, rather than just at more cases' (Cohen 1994: 11).

Irish Foreign Policy on Iraq

In the 1990s, Ireland clung on to neutrality while committing itself to the development of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) within the EU (Rees 2006, 175). Ireland has also engaged in deepening cooperation with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme (Rees, 2006: 175). In 1999, Kosovo put Irish neutrality to yet another test. Public support for the Kosovo War was not very strong in Ireland, with only 46% supporting (42% were opposed) and there was also some degree of mobilisation in the form of anti-war protests. Initially, the government neither supported nor condemned the NATO intervention, but later, after a meeting with other EU leaders, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern gave his support for the continuation of bombing (Rees, 2006: 182).

The Irish government offered assistance to the US shortly after the events of 9/11, and within a fortnight over 2,000 US troops had travelled through Shannon airport (Newby and Titley, 2003: 485). As Iraq returned to the top of the international agenda shortly after the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrat coalition government tried to remain neutral in the issue. However, the stop-over policy started to fuel considerable domestic resentment towards the end of 2002. In September, the Green Party criticised the government's stop-over policy for eroding Irish neutrality and, in October, ten anti-war activists were arrested after over 50 people breached the perimeter fence surrounding the airfield at Shannon (Miller, 2005: 167). By January 2003, anti-war protests in Shannon became more frequent and the political opposition to the stop-over policy also intensified. The anti-war movement established a 'peace camp' at Shannon as a site for permanent protest and to enable constant monitoring of the

activity at the airport (Newby and Titley, 2003: 486). Opposition parties requested a Dáil debate on Shannon, which took place on 29 January. The debate did not pass without drama, with the Green Party protesting by raising a banner that read 'No to War' and marching out in protest at the stop-over policy (Miller, 2005: 169).

In a Gallup International survey (mid-January 2003), 69% of Irish respondents said that Ireland should not support military action against Iraq. According to some estimates, 100,000 people attended an anti-war rally in Dublin on 15 February. A commonly expressed view within the anti-war movement was that the government was willing to compromise Irish neutrality and put moral issues aside to secure economic ties with the US. The Irish economy was largely dependent on US investments and the government feared that changing its policy on stop-over flights could harm economic relations (Miller, 2005: 170–1). Another concern with regard to the stop-over policy was that it could make Ireland a target for terrorists.

Table 1: Public Opinion on Iraq in Ireland (Gallup International 2003)

Are you in favour of military action in Iraq?

1 Under no circumstances	39%
2 Only if sanctioned by the UN	50%
3 Unilaterally by America and its allies	8%
4 Don't know/no opinion	3%

If military action goes ahead, do you think Ireland should support this action?

1 Should support	26%
2 Should not support	69%
3 Don't know/no opinion	5%

On 13 March, Taoiseach Ahern met President Bush in the White House, where he emphasised the importance of UN sanction for the legality of war. Yet the Irish government avoided taking a stance on whether it would allow the use of Shannon if the US commenced military action against Iraq. Eventually, the government decided to continue the stop-over policy which granted the US 'access to Shannon for troop, equipment and maintenance stop-overs following the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq' (Miller, 2005: 173). The Irish government insisted that this did not constitute participation in the war. On 20 March, Ahern wrote an article ('Saddam, not Bush or Blair, is responsible for the crisis') for the *Irish Independent*, which blamed Saddam Hussein for the war and emphasised Ireland's 'deep bonds of democratic values and of political as well as historic ties' with the US and the UK.

Research Design
This article explores the extent to which mainstream news on international conflict is influenced by the national political environment. Using qualitative content analysis, it investigates the relationship between the coverage of the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq War in the press and Irish government policies on the war. The newspapers

studied include the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, its Sunday edition *Sunday Independent* and to a lesser extent also the *Sunday Tribune*. It analyses newspaper coverage following Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council meeting on 5 February (6-12 February) and President Bush's ultimatum to President Saddam Hussein on 17 March, shortly before the beginning of the war (18-24 March). The *Irish Times* was accessed through Factiva while other newspapers were accessed through their own online archives.

Table 2: The Number of Items Published on Iraq

Newspaper	Period of analysis		Total
	6-12 February	18-24 March	
The *Irish Independent*/ Sunday Independent	85	202	287
The *Irish Times*	71	186	257
Total	156	388	544

The *Irish Times*, which is popular among urban professionals, is 'liberal and progressive in character' (Phelan, 2004: 178) while the *Irish Independent*, which is read by a conservative rural population, could be characterised as centre-right. The *Irish Times* is often considered to be Ireland's most influential newspaper, although the *Irish Independent* is the sales leader (O'Regan, 2010: 448). According to the Joint National Readership Survey (2003), the readership of the *Irish Independent* was 532,000 in 2003 while the *Irish Times*'s readership was 319,000. The *Irish Independent*'s Sunday edition, the *Sunday Independent*, had a readership of 1,064,000 in 2003 – more than a third of the Sunday newspaper market. The second most popular Sunday broadsheet was the *Sunday Tribune*. O'Regan (2007: 13) has argued that these newspapers play 'opinion leader' roles 'in Irish public and political life and are well-positioned in the Irish media market'. Moreover, she argues that it is often assumed that they are widely read by both other media and the elites.

The Irish newspaper market is highly concentrated. Independent News and Media Plc sells 80% of all newspapers in the country. In 2003, the company owned the *Irish Independent* together with its Sunday edition, the national *Evening Herald* and eleven regional newspapers. Independent News and Media also owned London's *Independent* in 2003 and operates, for example, in the Australian and South African media markets. Since 1974, the *Irish Times* has been run by the Irish Times Trust with an objective to secure it as 'an independent newspaper primarily concerned with serious issues for the benefit of the community throughout the whole of Ireland, free from any form of personal or party political, commercial, religious or other sectional control' (Irishtimes.com, 2010). Irish newspapers compete with British newspapers in the domestic media market as a result of geographical proximity and a shared language.

Powell's Presentation, 6–12 February
The assumption here is that the editorial responses to Powell's presentation at the UN Security Council meeting, where the US effectively made the case for war,

reflect newspapers' attitudes towards the use of force against Iraq in general and that these attitudes would reflect elite opinion in Ireland, if not the government position. In addition, other commentary and news items are discussed where appropriate.

The *Irish Times* (6 February) was sceptical of the US case for war and raised questions about the Bush administration's cooperation with the UN weapons inspections since the intelligence, presented by Powell, apparently had not been made available to them earlier. The editorial called for reinforcement of inspections and insisted that 'the US must fully respect the UN's role in coming weeks'. The *Irish Times* also ran news stories on Arab perspectives on the US war plans (for example, 'Arab commentators accuse US of fabricating evidence', 7 February; and 'Kuwait welcomes decision to send Gulf Force', 10 February).[1]

An editorial in the *Irish Independent* ('Powell puts his case', 6 February) argued for continuation of weapons inspections if the UN Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix was to request more time. The editorial also argued that 'Saddam Hussein ranks among the worst tyrants. He is a mass murderer and a destroyer. He oppresses his own people and threatens his neighbours. It is easy to believe him capable of any evil deed.' An editorial in the *Sunday Independent* ('Countdown to war is imminent', 9 February) argued that the US should get UN authorisation for the use of force and also called for caution: 'There must be a proper assessment of the balance of risks. To win the war but lose the peace by removing Saddam Hussein from power while destabilising the whole region in the process, and thereby boosting terrorism would be wholly counterproductive.'

Ireland's second biggest Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Tribune*, adopted a similar position to that taken by the *Irish Independent*. On 9 February, its editorial ('Military neutrality does not mean political neutrality') argued that:

> In the coming weeks, the members of the UN security council will have to balance the evils of war against the evils of allowing Saddam to continue to flout its authority. The UN has allowed him to make a mockery of its resolutions on weapons of mass destruction since 1991. It is only in the shadow of war that he has made even a token effort to allow Hans Blix and his inspectors back into Iraq to carry out the UN mandate. War will only be avoided if Saddam finally complies, even at this late hour, and fully cooperates with the inspectors.

It is worth noting that while the editorials may have had slightly different emphases, they did not contradict the largely vague government policy line. In common with Irish government statements on the issue, there were references to the depravity of the Iraqi government.

Interestingly, several items found a historical parallel in Adlai Stevenson's presentation at the UN during the Cuban missile crisis, though often this incident was

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1 Strangely, the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* reported quite differently on Hillary Clinton's views on the Iraq crisis. The former ran the headline: 'Hillary Clinton tells Irish TV she is against war with Iraq' (8 February), while a headline in the latter read "Back US against Iraq, says Hillary" (9 February). The *Irish Times* emphasised that Hillary Clinton 'would prefer to see more time given to the UN weapons inspections' but the *Irish Independent* argued that she 'calls on Ireland's support for military action to disarm Saddam Hussein in "a war that involves all of us."'

Table 3: Number of items quoting different sources, 6–12 February 2003[2]

	US govt	UN	Iraqi govt	France	Anti-war states Germany	Russia
Irish Independent/ Sunday Independent (n=85)	33 (38.8%)	9 (10.6%)	7 (8.2%)	6 (7.1%)	7 (8.2%)	3 (3.5%)
Irish Times (n=71)	26 (36.7%)	8 (11.3%)	6 (8.5%)	8 (11.3%)	3 (4.2%)	6 (8.5%)
Total (n=156)	59 (37.8%)	17 (10.9%)	13 (8.3%)	14 (9.0%)	10 (6.4%)	9 (5.8%)

mentioned in order to point out what Powell's presentation was not. For example, the above-mentioned editorial in the *Irish Independent* rejected the comparison by arguing that '[a]cross the world, comparisons have been made with the famous occasion in 1962 when Ambassador Adlai Stevenson showed the United Nations incontrovertible proof of the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. It was very different yesterday.'

Yet, many of the correspondents were clearly impressed with Colin Powell's performance. Conor O'Clery, foreign correspondent with the *Irish Times*, wrote:

> Colin Powell did not disappoint. With the atmosphere in the chamber like that of a courtroom, he gave a compelling presentation of the US case against Iraq … When Powell, immaculate in dark power suit and pink tie, sat down at 10.30a.m. to begin his delivery, the atmosphere changed abruptly to that of a courtroom about to hear a capital case. It was as if Mr Powell had been sent to state the case for the prosecution and to call for the death sentence, and to warn that if he did not get the verdict he wanted, then the court of world opinion might itself have no future.

The *Sunday Tribune* provided a view from Baghdad ('Calmly waiting for the wail of war sirens', 9 February):

> The real fear of many people here was that the US would have unveiled some genuinely damaging evidence that would have made the case for war inconvertible. They manifestly failed to do this in the view of Baghdad's public with the idea of mobile biological weapons laboratories being a touch too Ian Fleming even for them.

The reporter also interviewed Ali Jassem, who ran one of the facilities Powell accused of illegitimate activities. Jassem explained that the weapons inspectors had been to the site several times already and had not found anything suspicious. The

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2 France, Germany and Russia adopted a joint statement on 11 February and it was read out by the French President, Jacques Chirac, at the press conference. Consequently, quotations of the joint statement were recorded as being from a French governmental source.

Sunday Tribune also ran a piece sympathetic towards the anti-war movement ('To be anti-war is not to be anti-US or even anti our own government', 9 February).

As table 3 indicates, US sources were quoted much more frequently than Iraqi sources, any of the three leading anti-war states, or the UN, regardless of the fact that the Irish government emphasised the role of the UN in the process. These findings are in line with O'Regan's (2010) analysis of Irish press coverage of the Iraq War 2002–7. She argues that 'even highly prominent and well-resourced international actors, particularly the UN and its affiliated organisations, were rarely sourced. This finding appears even more extraordinary in light of the high levels of political and public support enjoyed by the UN within Ireland' (O'Regan, 2010: 458).

Bush's Ultimatum and the Beginning of the War

Bush's ultimatum to Saddam Hussein on 17 March forced the Irish government to formulate its position on the imminent war. On the day that the war began, 20 March, Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Cowen gave the following statement to the Dáil:

> Ireland has repeatedly stated its view that if Iraq continued in its non-compliance, a second Security Council resolution should be adopted. We believe that this is what should have been done. The United States and Britain have long held the view that earlier Security Council Resolutions already mandate the use of force, and that no further authorisation is required. They are now acting on this belief. It is clear that there is no generally accepted view on the validity of the different interpretations and it is unlikely that agreement on this point can be reached (Dáil Eireann, 20 March 2003).

Cowen held the Iraqi President responsible for the situation. With regard to US military access to Ireland's Shannon airport, Cowen announced that

> For us now to withdraw facilities at Shannon would not only be in direct contrast to what we have done on previous occasions, but would antagonise two of our most important friends and partners. The core of our neutrality, as I have said, lies in independence of judgement – in being able to make up our minds about what is right for Ireland.

After heavy criticism from the opposition parties, including Fine Gael, Labour, the Green Party and Sinn Féin, the government motion for continued overflight and landing rights for the US military was carried by 77 votes to 60.

Opinion items in the Irish newspapers presented a wide range of views. The editorials and commentaries in the *Irish Independent/Sunday Independent* included both quite passionate endorsements of the military action as well as criticism, though to a lesser degree. For instance, Eoghan Harris defended the war in the *Sunday Independent* ('Comments of mass distraction buried in bodybags of bluster', 23 March): 'No war is a good war, but this necessary war comes close to being a noble war. It is a great thing to free a people from a tyrant. And it is a tragedy that the Irish republic is either standing sullenly on the sidelines, or, even worse, on the wrong side.' Clearly, Harris would not have liked to have seen Shannon closed to the US mili-

tary. Other pro-war opinion items included, for instance, 'Move against Saddam not just a war but a just war' (*Sunday Independent*, 23 March); 'The bigger the crisis, the more we opt to duck it' (*Sunday Independent*, 23 March); and 'Why it is time to stand by our friends' (*Irish Independent*, 20 March).

Robert Fisk's reports from Baghdad and some letters-to-the-editor condemning the US/UK invasion as well as the Irish government's stop-over policy, were among the few articles published in the *Irish Independent* that were unequivocally critical of the war. Another exception was Simon Jenkins's commentary piece ('Bin Laden's laughter echoes across the battlefield', 19 March), which was also published in the *Times* (of London). He dissected the US/UK case for war and argued that '[i]t is a poor comment on the civilised West in the 21st century that its chief means of retaliation against terrorism is a declaration of war on whole peoples.' Jenkins saw the war playing into the hands of al-Qaeda: 'Nothing can be giving bin Laden greater pleasure than the spectacle of the West going to war to topple his hated foe, the "atheist Satan", Saddam Hussein.'

In contrast to the *Irish Independent*, the *Irish Times* and the *Sunday Tribune* were largely critical of the US/UK invasion of Iraq. On 18 March, the *Irish Times* ('On the brink of an unacceptable war') argued that:

> The aims of this war are changed by the circumstances of its pronouncement. Disarming Iraq is secondary now to overthrowing the Saddam Hussein regime and reordering Middle East politics. Such objectives are emphatically not covered by existing UN resolutions, however abstractly desirable. The price paid in terms of legality and legitimacy is too high. We must hope for a short war. But the subsequent peace remains deeply problematic and contested because of these unacceptable decisions by the United States, Britain and their allies.

The *Irish Times* also took a critical stance on the government's continuation of the stop-over policy ('Decision time on Shannon', 20 March):

> If military neutrality is to mean anything in these circumstances, it should involve refusing the movement of troops or munitions of war across our territory, as other European neutrals have done. The use of Shannon Airport should be refused. But if our political alignments are greater than the avowed principle of neutrality, perhaps this is the time to confront and implement a new foreign policy. We are politically aligned towards the US and UK, neutral in the cop-out sense, and demonstrably political passengers in the first march in international affairs of the 21st century.

The *Irish Times*'s Fintan O'Toole harshly criticised the stop-over policy in his opinion piece 'Throwing principle to the wind' (22 March):

> The Government contends, of course, that the use of Shannon does not really amount to participation in the war. Even if this were true, it certainly amounts to something even more momentous: support for the replacement of the UN by US-led 'coalitions of the willing'.
>
> By choosing Boston rather than Berlin, we have tied ourselves to the agenda of a confident, aggressive right-wing faction in the US. Seldom in

Irish history can so profound a choice have been made with such little thought, either for the sacrifices of the past or the dangers of the future.

Nevertheless, the *Irish Times* also published Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's article, 'We stand by neutrality and support for UN'. While acknowledging that the legality of the use of military force against Iraq was disputed, he defended the stop-over policy: 'We have been making such facilities available for half a century, throughout many wars and crises. We have pursued our policy of military neutrality throughout that period. Maintaining these facilities does not mean we are participating in a war.' There were also a few other opinion pieces which could be characterised as pro-war. For instance, Kevin Myers's regular column 'An Irishman's diary' defended the US policy and argued that 'it is not the Americans who have fatally undermined the authority of the UN, but the UN itself, with its pomposities, its conceits, its humbug, its meaningless pieties' (see also John Waters's 'Bush and Blair doing right thing', 24 March).

A leader article in the *Sunday Tribune* ('Victory would not make Bush's war legitimate', 23 March) adopted a clear anti-war editorial stance:

> The removal of Saddam Hussein will not justify the death and destruction so far wreaked by the allies. It will not justify our government's lapdog attitude to the Americans, an attitude clearly demonstrated when Ireland became the only country in Europe to hold a national day of mourning for the victims of the World Trade Centre attack. Will we hold a similar day of mourning for the dead in Iraq?
>
> […] Some will say that opposing the war, that protesting for peace, is futile. It may well be. But it is also right, moral, decent, civilised and Christian.
>
> We will continue to oppose it.

The *Sunday Tribune*'s Iraq coverage was quite consistently critical of the invasion. For instance, Special Correspondent Harry McGee wrote ('A wretched war, started on lies, reliant on lies', 23 March):

> US president George Bush said that the war had been launched to protect the American people from the threat of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, to enforce the Security Council's long-standing demands. America and its allies, he said, had the 'resolve to meet this threat to peace'. Blair's justification focuses on so-called asymmetrical threats. 'This new world faces a new threat of disorder and chaos born either of brutal states like Iraq, armed with weapons of mass destruction, or extreme terrorist groups. Both hate our way of life, our freedom and democracy. My fear, deeply held, based in part on the intelligence that I see, is that these threats come together and deliver catastrophe to our country and world.' But did Iraq ever pose such a threat? Was it really capable of bringing the entire world to its knees so much so that it justified an attack of such a calamitous nature? What happens if no weapons of mass destruction are unearthed when the regime is eventually over-run? Where does the campaign against terrorism stop? How do you describe the

extraordinary arsenal of uranium-enriched warheads, daisy cutters, cluster bombs, the new super-bomb that can zap everything within 600m. As conventional weapons?

He continued by arguing that the war 'has a dubious legal basis, was started in contradiction of the will of the international community, and will give a legitimacy to a very dangerous and very scary doctrine, that of pre-emption.' However, the *Sunday Tribune* also presented views sympathetic to the US policy in an interview of Gay Byrne who did not see an alternative to supporting US/UK position on Iraq or Irish stop-over policy ('To whom it may concern … the war is just', 23 March).

The Irish newspapers reflected the divisions within the political elite on the Iraq War and Ireland's decision on Shannon. As suggested by the elite version of the manufacturing consent literature, elite dissensus brought the Shannon issue in the 'sphere of legitimate controversy' (Hallin 1986, 116–17) meaning that reporters sought to be balanced and objective. In other words, the diversity in elite opinion enabled newspaper editors to allow a wide range of views in the coverage.

Table 4: Items Quoting US and Iraqi Governmental and Military Sources (18–24 March)

| | US | | Iraqi | |
	Government	Military	Government	Military
Irish Independent/ Sunday Independent (n=202)	36 (17.8%)	20 (10.0%)	21 (10.4%)	2 (1.0%)
Irish Times (n=186)	30 (16.1%)	14 (7.5%)	23 (12.4%)	4 (2.2%)
Total (n=388)	66 (17.0%)	34 (8.8%)	44 (11.3%)	6 (1.5%)

The different strategies in acquiring content explain the slight differences in sourcing patterns (see tables 4 and 5). The *Irish Independent* relied heavily on British newspapers in its international coverage. 88 out of 112 items originated from the *Times* (27), *Daily Telegraph* (30) and the *Independent*/Independent News Service (31). Hence, it frequently published reports from British reporters who were embedded with the troops and often quoted military sources. Meanwhile, its main competition, the *Irish Times*, relied on its extensive network of foreign correspondents as it had correspondents in Iran/Northern Iraq, Jordan and Baghdad. Moreover, the *Irish Times* regularly ran reports from Jack Fairweather who was embedded with the British army. Consequently, on 18 March alone, the *Irish Times* ran reports from Baghdad, Tehran, Amman, Jerusalem, Moscow, New York, London, Brussels and Kuwait.

Conclusion
While this analysis is limited to two weeks of press coverage, it clearly indicates that the press did not simply echo the government position on the Iraq war. Based on previous research, one could argue that this was because the Irish government appeared hesitant and because the political elite were divided over the issue of Iraq and the stopover policy (elite dissensus). Opinions were polarised, clearly indicating

**Table 5: Items Quoting Major Anti-War Countries and
International Organisations (18–24 March)**

| | Anti-war countries | | | International organisations | |
	France	Germany	Russia	UN	Aid agencies
Irish Independent/					
Sunday Independent (n=202)	6 (3.0%)	3 (1.5%)	1 (0.5%)	6 (3.0%)	1 (0.5%)
Irish Times (n=186)	10 (5.4%)	9 (4.8%)	9 (4.8%)	14 (7.5%)	3 (1.6%)
TOTAL (n=388)	16 (4.1%)	12 (3.1%)	10 (2.6%)	20 (5.2%)	4 (1.0%)

that elite dissensus had brought the Iraq policy into the sphere of legitimate controversy.

The *Irish Times* and the *Sunday Tribune* were more sympathetic toward the anti-war views of the opposition parties than the *Irish Independent/Sunday Independent*. Nevertheless, both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent/Sunday Independent* presented pro-war and anti-war views. The *Sunday Tribune* coverage was most consistently anti-war during the first week of the invasion. Overall, the fact that Shannon airport linked Ireland to the invasion had a stimulating effect on public debate on the war itself.

To some extent, this study validates Cristina Archetti's (2008) argument that much of the variation in the news is due to factors at organisational (or even individual) level, such as editorial decisions. This study indicated that many journalists seemed to have the freedom to express their views even when they were at odds with the editorial line of the newspaper or other staff writers. For instance, Kevin Myers's regular column may not have been representative of the *Irish Times*'s editorial position on Iraq; nor were Robert Fisk's reports from Iraq in line with the *Irish Independent*'s editorial statements.

The studied newspapers had different methods of acquiring content. The *Irish Times* had adequate resources to cover the war quite independently. However, the *Irish Independent* largely depended on UK newspapers to provide international coverage of the war. It should be mentioned, however, that since the war divided the UK press, a mixture of articles from the *Independent*/Independent News Service, the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* did not provide uniformly pro-war views. The *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* had slightly different sourcing patterns, as the latter published items from British newspapers that had embedded reporters in the field. Overall, the sourcing patterns supported the notion of power indexing or a political calibration effect – that is, US government and military sources were used to a greater extent as their actions were driving the events.

While it has been argued that Murdoch-owned media outlets adopted an editorial policy which was in line with his personal stance on the war (Bromley, 2004: 227; Thussu, 2004), Independent News and Media did not seem to impose uniform editorial policies as the British *Independent* and the *Irish Independent/Sunday Independent* adopted different editorial positions on the Iraq war.

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